

Mr. Speaker, the House is once again in an unexamined rush to make semi-permanent the government's ability to seek all matter of records on citizens without having to demonstrate to a court that citizens under suspicion are actually engaged in terrorist activities.

The power of government for surveillance and enforcement are among the most important but also the most fearsome. We know these authorities and others have been abused, because the Department of Justice Inspector General has told us so. I know it, because for 8 years I served on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. Let me tell you, American freedom and security are not well-served by the excessive secrecy imposed on our society and government by this legislation.

The Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, which is responsible for approving government surveillance requests under the PATRIOT Act, is the kind of court that should be used only rarely and in the most special circumstances. Instead, it has become part of a kind of routine clandestine government.

Treating some Americans as above suspicion and others as suspect without cause has made us a less just and also a less secure society.

The PATRIOT Act was originally passed at a time of high emotion in this country. Nearly a decade at the PATRIOT Act enactment, the death of Osama bin Laden has provided us with an opportunity to stop and reflect on all that has transpired over the last 10 years. It is past time for us to pause and reexamine the validity of the assumptions that led to the passage of the PATRIOT Act and the validity of its current application.

But, you say, we cannot debate the validity of its current application because those applications are classified at a very high level. That is precisely one of the points we should be debating thoroughly before any reauthorization.

Sitting on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence for 8 years, let me tell you, that secrecy does not serve America well.